

## **Palm Sunday Ambush or Battle of Bismarck, 20 March 2005**

Richard E. Killblane

The doctrine for reaction to a convoy ambush is very simple, clear the kill zone. For gun trucks the question is whether to be passive and just return fire or be aggressive and shove the fight down the throat of the enemy. During Operation Iraqi Freedom there were lots of convoy ambushes where the convoys and their escorts reacted exactly the way they were supposed to. The worst thing to do during a convoy ambush is stop in the kill zone, but sometimes this is unavoidable. It is times like these that those caught in the kill zone have to make quick decisions where lives hang in the balance. One such ambush occurred on Palm Sunday, 20 March 2005 near where ASR BISMARCK intersected with ASR DETROIT. This ambush is of great interest in not because everything went well but everything went wrong from the outset. There were as many as five different units involved this ambush making it probably the most complicated ambush of the war. Therefore this ambush provides a case study of decision making during the worst case scenario and plenty of examples of individual heroism that usually occurs during such times of intense chaos. War is chaos and there are no set solutions for reacting to chaos. It is the study of battles that teaches warriors to react.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Transportation Group after it replaced the 375<sup>th</sup> Transportation Group in Arifjan, Kuwait had every intention of continuing the 518<sup>th</sup> Gun Truck Company even though it had received the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 178<sup>th</sup> FA as its convoy escort battalion. The 7<sup>th</sup> Group selected volunteers from the arriving companies of the OIF 04-06 rotation to replace the OIF 2 veterans of the 518<sup>th</sup>. The replacements arrived at Udari Range the day after Thanksgiving 2004 and underwent two weeks of training. In mid-December, they fell in with the one remaining platoon of the old 518<sup>th</sup> who would train them with a couple right-seat, left-seat rides. Although many of the original 518<sup>th</sup> crews would not leave with their parent companies until February and March of the next year, the emphasis on getting rid of the “cowboy” attitude of the original members and starting over, caused the new company commander and 7<sup>th</sup> Group leadership to return the original members to their parent companies as soon as possible. The previous members of the 518<sup>th</sup> had

placed greater emphasis on maintenance of vehicles and weapons but little else. They often left ammunition in their vehicles upon return because they saw it as a waste of time to take the ammunition out at night when they would just have to load it up again the next morning. Keeping the vehicles uploaded, however, gave them a quicker response time if needed. They often left trash in their vehicles, but their previous performance in combat validated the saying that good combat units do not pass inspections. They were battle hardened veterans of the April Uprising. They may not have looked pretty but they had proved they could fight. The new regime wanted a higher state of discipline. Vehicles would be cleaned and ammunition would be returned to the arms room at the end of each mission. They followed the philosophy that if the leaders paid attention to the little details the big things would take care of themselves.

While the replacements were highly motivated, they had not been blooded in combat as had the original members. They were well-trained by MPRI at Udari but unlike the original company, whose two officers were heavily involved in the coaching and leading of the company, the new 518<sup>th</sup> had an absentee company commander, CPT Thelonious McLean-Burrell, spent most of his time at Camp Arifjan. A rift grew between him and 1LT McCormick and CPT McLean-Burrell did his best to keep the aggressive lieutenant off the road with the men. McCormick was a warrior leader who had proven his courage during the Easter Weekend ambushes and the Battle of BIAP. He had also developed the tactics of the 518<sup>th</sup>. CFLCC also denied the gun trucks use of the open desert to test fire their weapons and a suitable replacement test fire range was not found. They would not know how well their weapons worked until they engaged the enemy. Essentially the burden of training and leading the gun truck crews fell to the NCOs, but no one except a few older NCOs like SFC Louis Cass, platoon sergeant, had any combat experience. Because the transition between the old and new crews was so short, the replacement gun truck crews did not carry on the practice of conducting nightly after action reviews after each convoy and war gaming ambush scenarios.

With the myriad of different types of armor, CLFCC categorized armored vehicles into three types. Locally produced “hillbilly” armor was called Level 3 armor. Factory-built

add-on armor was called Level 2 and factory-built armored vehicles such as the M1114 or M1117 Armored Support Vehicle now called Level 1 armored vehicles. By the end of 2004, enough add-on armor (AOA) kits for HMMWVs had arrived and all the old M998 gun trucks of the 518<sup>th</sup> were replaced with M1025 and M1026 HMMWVs with the Level 2 armor that other Iraqi-based units had traded in for brand new M1114s. Units in Iraq still had priority for M1114s. So vehicle design and armor in the 518<sup>th</sup> was standardized. Most had M2 .50 caliber machineguns mounted on rings with turret shields and gun shields. Because these did not have any armor around the engine compartment, the new 518<sup>th</sup> abandoned the “turn, fix and fire” doctrine. They did not want to expose the front of their gun trucks to the enemy fire. Most gun trucks employed dual weapon systems, a M2 and a M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW).<sup>1</sup>

The group commander, COL Jeff Miser, seemed to show an affinity toward anything that resembled the 5-ton gun trucks of the Vietnam War with their black paint and elaborately painted names on the sides of the gun boxes. Like many other field grade officers, he respected the achievements of the gun truck crews of Vietnam and believed they did the best with what they had. However, COL Miser had ordered the 518<sup>th</sup> to dismantle all four of its 5-ton gun trucks, regardless of how much they liked them. The current senior leaders’ version of professionalism, however, frowned on the individualism of the Vietnam gun trucks especially exemplified by their elaborate art work. Consequently, a MNCI and CFLCC policy restricted art work of any kind on trucks but 7<sup>th</sup> Group did cast a blind eye to the company logos that were spray-painted on the doors. In keeping with this anti-Vietnam gun truck attitude, both MNCI and CFLCC wanted to come up with a new term to call their gun trucks. MNCI coined the term convoy protection platform (CPP) while 7<sup>th</sup> Group came up with the term convoy escort platform (CEP), both the same creature by a different name. The crews continued to call them gun trucks.

After the April Uprising the year before, the gun truck escort ratio south of SCANIA was set at 1:10 and supposed to be 1:5 north of SCANIA. However, there were not enough gun trucks to go around so many Kuwait-based convoys ran with only three gun trucks

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<sup>1</sup> SFC David Van Roekel email to Richard Killblane, November 20, 2006.

per convoy regardless of the side. The goal was to keep the convoys below 30 vehicles. The 518<sup>th</sup> had asked for addition HMMWV gun trucks so they could run with four per convoy, but again there were just not enough available.<sup>2</sup>

On Saturday, 19 March 2005, three HMMWVs of the 518<sup>th</sup> escorted an IRAQI EXPRESS convoy of the 1<sup>st</sup> Squad, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, 1075<sup>th</sup> Medium Truck Company (NE NG) led by SSG Jeffrey M. Uhl from Camp NAVISTAR to Logistic Support Area (LSA) ANACONDA just north of Baghdad. The last truck companies from OIF II had redeployed and the 1075<sup>th</sup> had been in country since October 2004. Because of the ratio of one green military truck to every four commercial white trucks, convoys were organized by squads. Uhl's six M915A3 tractor and trailer systems and two bobtails accompanied 22 IAP Worldwide Services and Department of Defense (DOD) contract trucks. These drivers were mostly speaking drivers hired from English speaking countries, but there were also Third Country Nationals (TCN) who spoke different languages. Because of the language barrier and experience, they were entirely unpredictable in an ambush. Although the company had previously trained in the States with the convoy commander in the middle of the convoy and his assistant riding up front, SSG Uhl rode up front as recommended by the company they replaced. They explained that often the security guards at the gate of each destination would stop the convoy and want to speak with the convoy commander. Not only that but every convoy commander's biggest fear was making the wrong turn and getting lost in downtown Baghdad. His assistant convoy commander, SGT Anthony Bloebaum, rode in the middle of the convoy.<sup>3</sup>

When their convoy crossed the border at Safwan, a road spike ripped out the oil pan of one M915. Uhl hooked his lead bobtail up to the trailer and left the damaged tractor at Convoy Support Center (CSC) SCANIA for repairs, so the convoy only had one remaining bobtail. The 518<sup>th</sup> Gun Truck Company provided the escort for the convoy with the call sign, "Regulator." Their three HMMWVs with add-on-armor were armed

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<sup>2</sup> SFC David Van Roekel email to Richard Killblane, November 20, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> 2LT Charles Gilkey, "Convoy 678N Engagement Narrative;" CPT Kevin Hynes, "Under Fire, Nebraska drivers played critical role during Battle of Bismarck," *Prairie Soldier*, February 2006.

with .50 caliber machineguns. Regulator 1 and 3 were manned by active duty volunteers from the 567<sup>th</sup> Cargo Transfer Company and trained by SFC Cass. The crew of Regulator 2 came from the Reserve companies. Other than a few IEDs, none had been under fire yet. The convoy rested over night at SCANIA and would finish the run to ANACONDA on Sunday.<sup>4</sup>

On Palm Sunday, 20 March, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Squad, 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, B Battery, 1-623<sup>rd</sup> FA, an Kentucky National Guard unit whose call sign was “Stallion 33,” escorted 30 Army Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) vehicles driven by Third Country Nationals, primarily Turkish, in the opposite direction from ANACONDA to SCANIA. Stallion 33 led by SFC Rickie D. Hammons consisted of three M1114s, two with M2 .50 caliber machineguns and one Mk19 automatic grenade launcher. They had been in country since December 2004. Following behind them were three M1114s of 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad, 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon, 617<sup>th</sup> MP Company, another Kentucky National Guard unit led by SSG Timothy F. Nein, call sign “Raven 42.” Likewise they had two M2s and one Mk19. Raven 42 had experienced several ambushes and habitually discussed the day’s events and what they could do better. The 617<sup>th</sup> MPs based out of Camp LIBERTY, Baghdad had responsibility for route security. The 617<sup>th</sup> MP had been in country since November 2004.<sup>5</sup>

Movement control changed the routes every few days. There were only three routes between SCANIA and ANACONDA to choose from so the enemy was not confused. After the convoys quit running one route, the enemy knew it would be about seven days before they would return. This gave them plenty of time to prepare. This day all convoys would follow the eastern route which was about a nine hour drive. The wide open desert of the eastern route provided ideal cover with its scattered trees and irrigation ditches and consequently had a bad reputation for enemy attacks. The drivers called one stretch “IED alley” because of the frequency of IED attacks.

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<sup>4</sup> Hynes, “Under Fire.”

<sup>5</sup> CPT Eric S. Minor, Memorandum for Record, Subject: Historical summary on 20MAR05 Ambush on ASR Detroit, 503<sup>rd</sup> Military Police Battalion (Airborne), 27 March 2005.

The MPs performed route security by reconnoitering the routes prior to convoys hitting the road and then patrolling the roads afterwards. The MPs did not have a good reputation with the truck drivers for standing and fighting but the 617<sup>th</sup> MP was an exception. The company commander, CPT Todd Lindner, enforced high standards of discipline, training and uniformity. SSG Nein was on his second tour and understood the enemy tactics. While the enemy usually attacked in small cells of 7 to 10 men, in the open desert of the eastern route he had seen them ambush convoys with larger forces of over 20 insurgents. What he may not have understood was that large ambushes usually consisted of 40 to 50 insurgents, significantly more than 20. Although not very coordinated, their tactic was to hit the convoys fast and hard before any one could counter-attack. The attacks were usually initiated with rockets or machineguns and once in a while mortars then followed up with small arms fire that would last three to four minutes. They would escape in vehicles that ran faster than the up-armored HMMWVs and before the nearest quick reaction force could arrive. Because of the secrecy in which they operated and the disconnection between cells, the ambushes showed detailed planning and inflexible execution, very similar to ambushes during the Vietnam War.<sup>6</sup>

Raven 42 had been ambushed twice before. The first time was on the night of 27 January. As the three gun trucks were driving by, the enemy opened fire and the M1114s returned fire then called in the Cavalry. Early one morning on 29 January, Raven 42 was out scouting for IEDs and ambushes an hour or so before the convoy window opened when they surprised seven to 12 insurgents setting up an ambush behind small berms, a concrete barrier wall, a couple cars and a concrete block building. That day, SGT Dustin Morris' vehicle was in the lead and he had a senior ranking NCO driving his M1114, who was not his regular driver. The insurgents opened fire on Raven 42 with small arms and RPGs thinking they had been discovered. Instead of reacting according to SSG Nein's instructions, Morris' driver reacted the way he thought best and failed to either act in unison or react fast enough. The fight lasted for 15 minutes until five of the seven insurgents escaped on foot through dense vegetation in the canal system leaving two

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<sup>6</sup> SSG Timothy F. Nein interview by Tom Bruscino at Ft Leavenworth, KS, 28 June 2006; and SGT Dustin Morris interview by Tom Bruscino at Ft Leavenworth, KS, 19 July 2006.

wounded to fall in the hands of the MPs. The MPs learned to react faster and act in unison. In addition, there found situations where the crews needed to dismount and others where they did not. They had to be flexible.<sup>7</sup>

On 18 March, Raven 42 had been sitting in an observation post along ASR DETROIT. About ten minutes after they moved out, they heard a call for assistance from a white convoy reported that was hit in the very same place Raven 42 had just vacated. Nein could not believe it. When they returned, sure enough, around 50 insurgents had opened fire with RPGs and small arms fire destroying or disabling 16 out of 30 vehicles.<sup>8</sup>

Raven 42 liked the tactic of shadowing white convoys, since the enemy targeted those convoys most. Following behind the convoy allowed the escorts to focus on clearing the kill zone while the MPs engaged the enemy. Nein's 2<sup>nd</sup> Squad had driven the same routes for three to four months and knew them well. At night after they returned, they would sit around a dry erase board, reviewing what they had done, map out most likely ambush spots and war game what each crew would do perfecting their battle drills. Each crew member was encouraged to participate and suggest what they could do better. In the end, each crew member knew exactly what he or she would do and that would become their new tactic, technique and procedure (TTP). They then improved upon their vehicle load plans. Nein did not like clutter. His company commander, CPT Todd Linder, had emphasized setting and maintaining standards. In combat, each crew member needed to know exactly where everything was and they could afford to have nothing in the way like coolers and trash. In the heat of combat, there was no time to waste moving things around. Nein took pride that his team leaders, SGT Joe Rivera, SGT Leigh Ann Hester and SGT Dustin Morris, maintained the standards no matter how long they had been on the road. They performed their preventive maintenance checks and cleaned out their vehicles rather than just go straight to bed even if they only had nine hours before they would go back out on the road again. Nein lived what he preached and had earned the utmost confidence of his Soldiers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nein interview and Morris interview.

<sup>8</sup> Nein interview.

<sup>9</sup> Nein interview.

It was around 1030 hours on the morning of 20 March, when Raven 42 fell in behind the convoy of Stallion 33 after it entered their sector. Raven 42 notified the convoy on the Sheriff net that they would shadow them to the end of their patrol sector where ASR DETROIT met up with ASR BISMARCK. The area was vast open desert cut by irrigation canals and dotted with scattered groves of trees and houses. The convoy radioed back that they were going to stop to refuel. Because the eastern route took nine hours to complete, the up-armored HMMWVs did not have enough fuel in their tanks to complete the run so they carried four extra gas cans and stopped along the route to refuel. The stop also allowed drivers to get out stretch their legs and relieve their bladders. Completing the refuel, the convoy started south again at about 1135 hours. Stallion 33A was the lead gun truck, Stallion 33B was the sixteenth vehicle in the convoy and Stallion 33C brought up the trail. Raven 42 trailed about 200 to 300 meters behind the convoy. About five minutes down the road, SSG Nein in the lead vehicle of Raven 42 noticed that the trucks in the middle of the convoy starting to maneuver to the left and right as if under fire. Suddenly one of the lead tractors was hit by an RPG, came to a halt and began burn. The Stallion 33 convoy was under fire from their right.<sup>10</sup>

The southbound AAFES convoy had just passed a large open plowed field with a power plant on the right, then over a wide irrigation ditch that ran east and west. A smaller irrigation ditch paralleled the west side of the road to the right of the convoy. Stallion 33A, the lead vehicle, came adjacent an access road leading off ASR DETROIT to the west. The area in between the large irrigation ditch and access road was covered by fields lined with groves of trees. SGT James R. Baker, the vehicle commander of Stallion 33A, saw two Iraqis stand up in the field to his right and fire an RPG and small arms at the convoy. He yelled at his driver, SPC William P. Young to clear the kill zone. They sped up as per doctrine and SPC Patrick T. Malone began firing away with his Mk19 automatic grenade launcher at the enemy on his right. Baker and Young heard explosions and looked behind them just in time to see the bus flip over what looked to them like eight times. A Ford sport utility vehicle (SUV) raced up beside them on their left as if

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<sup>10</sup> Nein interview and Minor, "Historical summary."

using their M1114 for cover. Young saw rounds stitch the side of the vehicle and window hitting the driver causing it to crash. Another SUV was also damaged in the initial fire and careened across the median. An RPG hit a tractor behind them setting it on fire. Stallion 33A drove through a gauntlet of enemy fire for approximately one and half miles then reached the Iraqi Check Point about two miles down the road. Upon reaching the safety of the check point, they realized that only one Third Country National (TCN) truck had followed them. The rest of the Third Country National drivers behind them had swerved and stopped their vehicles, climbed out of the cabs and hid behind the tires. Stallion 33B, the 16<sup>th</sup> vehicle in the convoy, and Stallion 33C, the trail vehicle, heard Baker call contact over the radio. Shortly after that the entire convoy came under fire. With the convoy halted, Stallion 33B moved around while 33C defended the rear of the convoy with fire.<sup>11</sup>

At the check point, SGT Baker told the Iraqi National Guard to go help the convoy. As the Iraqi left for the kill zone, the crew of Stallion 33A checked their vehicle for damage and checked the Third Country National driver. Stallion 33A waited for the rest of the convoy to clear the kill zone. About 15 minutes after the ambush began, it became clear that no one was able to escape, so SGT Baker called Stallion 33B and asked if they wanted him to come back into the kill zone. They said yes. Baker then instructed the TCN driver to remain at the check point and they turned their M1114 around and headed back into the kill zone passing the northbound 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy under fire.<sup>12</sup>

Earlier that morning 20 March, SSG Uhl of the 1075<sup>th</sup> Medium Truck was warned that there would be a demonstration in a town along the way and that insurgent activity had increased around a bridge south of ANACONDA, but nothing about an attack that had occurred on DETROIT two days prior. Uhl left one of his 22 M915s at SCANIA due to

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<sup>11</sup> SGT James Reed Baker, SPC William P. Young, SPC Patrick T. Malone, SGT Rickie D. Hammons, SGT Kevin R. Vogel, SPC Richard S. Saylor, SGT Ricky A. Burke, SGT Matthew T. Simpson, and SPC Kirby Gregory sworn statements, 20 March 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Baker, Young and Malone sworn statement. The time is based upon the videos shot by the two civilian contract drivers in the 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy and the video shot in Regulator 1 gun truck. Stallion 33A passed the convoy as SPC Beck was pulling Ricketts from his truck. She was not able to move forward until the truck behind her cleared the kill zone, which allowed Regulator 1 to leave the kill zone, which they did at 1157 hours.

an oil pan ripped open by a road spike near Safwan so his lead bobtail pulled the trailer. This would limit his maneuverability. SPC Jenny Beck had an unexplained nervousness about the trip that day and that morning she had told her fiancé, SPC Tim Bos, “I don’t want to leave. Can’t we stay here?” Bos was driving for SSG Uhl in the lead truck and Beck drove for Bloebaum in the third green truck. SPC John Harris driving the next green in line also felt nervous after he learned they were taking the notorious eastern route. Leaving SCANIA, the 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy traveled along the eastern route where they made the turn from ASR BISMARCK onto ASR DETROIT and headed north.<sup>13</sup>

The demonstration in the small town on the Tigris River was peaceful with a multitude of Iraqis walking around waving black flags. Most of the military drivers noticed nothing unusual, but Ron Hart, a veteran IAP contract driver, saw the Iraqis making the cutting gesture across the throat or bringing their hands together like they were praying then pointing to the drivers. He knew the significance of the gestures. The first was obvious and the second meant that they were going to meet God soon, a clear indication that there was something bad up the road.<sup>14</sup>

Around 1120 hours, the convoy had slowed down to snake its way through the Iraqi check point. Civilian traffic backed up as the Iraqi National Guardsmen waved the convoy through. The drivers saw an Iraqi National Guardsman standing there with an RPG on his shoulder, which was shock since they were not allowed to carry RPGs. The lead vehicles continued on up the four-lane paved road separated by a median while the rest accelerated coming out of the check point to catch up. There was the typical civilian traffic parked along the side of the road to let the convoy pass, nothing to raise suspicions. Both sides of the road were open fields with small groves of trees.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after clearing the check point, the lead vehicles saw none of the indicators of an ambush when around 1140 hours, gun fire broke out from a two-story building to their left rear in the open field about 150 to 200 meters from the road. Uhl saw the lead gun

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<sup>13</sup> Hynes, “Under Fire.”

<sup>14</sup> Ron Hart telephone interview with Richard Killblane, 12 May 2006 and Hynes, “Under Fire.”

<sup>15</sup> Jairo Torres video and Hynes, “Under Fire.”

truck start swerving then SPC Barbara Higgins, driving Regulator 1, screamed on the radio, "Contact left." The excitement in her voice surprised and confused SSG Uhl who asked his driver, "What did she say?" Bos answered, "I don't know." This was not like her. Higgins was a no-nonsense Soldier who normally did not get excited. Her HMMWV then swerved toward the center median and stopped for a few seconds. Bos tried to go around to the right but did not think he had enough room to pass and hit the brakes, subsequently bringing the entire convoy to a halt like an accordion. Higgins had pulled Regulator 1 out into a blocking position in the median as she had been taught. SSG David Van Roekel fired off an eight to ten-round burst of his .50 then waved at the lead vehicle to keep going.<sup>16</sup>

Uhl then heard what sounded like fire crackers and told Bos to drive around the right of Regulator 1. Three RPGs hit the road and exploded right next to them. Then from the southbound lane a SUV came veering across the median slamming into a parked car in front of him. Everyone in the northbound convoy assumed that SUV was an insurgent vehicle designed to block the road. Unknown to them, it was from a southbound AAFES convoy escorted by Stallion 33. The two convoys had literally run into each other in the middle of a large kill zone. Uhl again told Bos to keep going. He then called over the radio, "Action left. Keep moving." Bos accelerated and rammed the SUV spinning it around. He then pushed his way around the SUV to the left into the median which surprisingly was full of water. Mud splashed over his windshield while rounds pinged off the armor. The lead M915 cleared the kill zone as doctrine dictated and drove about a

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<sup>16</sup> SFC David Van Roekel email to Richard Killblane, October 24, and November 20, 2006; Van Roekel sworn statement, 20 March 2006; Interview with SSG David Van Roekel, SPC Barbara Higgins, PFC Jairo Torres, SGT Jonathan Kennedy by 2LT Charles Gilkey and Richard Killblane, 28 March 2005; and Hynes, "Under Fire." There was considerable discrepancy over the exact time of the ambush. The MNC-I SIGACTS listed the ambush as having started at 1155 hours. All the 623 FA sworn statements listed the time of the ambush at 1145 hours and the 503<sup>rd</sup> Military Police Battalion, Memorandum for Record, Subject: Historical summary on 20MAR05 Ambush on ASR Detroit, dated 27 March 2005, listed the time of the ambush "at approximately 1140hrs (local)." The 7<sup>th</sup> Transportation Group AAR, "Convoy 678N Engagement Narrative," only mentioned the time the convoy passed through the check point as 1120 hours, but did not estimate the time the ambush began. The video shot by Jairo Torres in Regulator 1 had them at the check point at 1120 hours and the video began filming again at 1152 hours after the ambush had started. Since the kill zone was only a couple miles up the road, it would not have taken but a few minutes to reach it, but it would have taken the convoy a good five to ten minutes just to clear the check point. The crews claimed to have been under fire for approximately 20 minutes. It is more likely that the 617<sup>th</sup> MPs and

mile down the road before Uhl looked in his side mirror and realized that no one had followed him. All he saw was smoke beginning to rise from the burning truck.<sup>17</sup>

By their doctrine, the lead gun truck was supposed to accompany the vehicles out of the kill zone but since only one vehicle escaped, Regulator 1 remained in the middle of the kill zone just past the overturned bus and dueled with the enemy. They saw an AAFES tractor and trailer stopped up ahead in the southbound lane about 20 meters from the grove of trees that lined the access road with two more white trucks behind it and a third that had just started to burn. Van Roekel saw four or five Iraqis in blue shirts and black pants, the uniform of Iraqi Police, pop up about 100 meters off the road to his left rear. One was wearing a black Kevlar. One was standing straight up while the rest walked, fired, crouched then stood up and fired again walking toward the convoy. He fired another eight-round burst of his .50 but it kept misfiring. The timing was off. They would have known this if they had been able to test fire their weapons. He switched to the SAW also mounted on his turret shield and fired. PFC Jairo Torres, sitting behind the driver, saw five insurgents around the two-story building to his left and one had an RPG. He and Higgins fired their M16s out windows on the enemy side dropping three enemy to the ground and the other two ran around the building. This was their first time under fire. SFC Ramiro, from the 1864<sup>th</sup> Medium Truck Company, was the NCOIC of the gun truck and by coincidence was on his first right-seat ride. Van Roekel was normally the NCOIC but was manning the gun.<sup>18</sup>

The gun fire was intense and RPGs were impacting up and down the convoy in rapid succession. There was excitement in the vehicle as they yelled out where they saw the enemy. Most of the fire was coming from the two-story house and direction of the warehouse a couple hundred meters behind it. At 1256 hours, around 15 minutes into the fight an RPG flew within feet of their HMMWV and struck the van that had halted behind the overturned bus. The driver of the commercial tractor either jumped out or was

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623<sup>rd</sup> FA had better communications with their headquarters so the 1140 to 1145 time is probably more accurate.

<sup>17</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Under Fire."

blown out the window, but he looked uninjured. Van Roekel yelled at Higgins, “RPG! Get back, get back!” It punched through the white trailer stalled in the southbound lane. A second RPG came flying at them. He felt a moving target was harder to hit and yelled, “Let’s get moving, let’s get moving!” Higgins backed the HMMWV up 20 meters. By then, Van Roekel was out of SAW ammunition and had to try and get his .50 working. He would fire a few rounds, pull back the charging handle and fire again. For 15 minutes, Regulator 1 had maneuvered and fired waiting for the convoy to move out of the kill zone but nothing happened.<sup>19</sup>

When the ambush began, the next four white trucks swerved violently and slowed to a halt at odd angles completely blocking the road. SGT Terrance Ricketts in his M915 five vehicles back pulled over to a halt near the median. Small arms fire bounced off his cab armor. He then inched his truck forward when the AAFES bus hit the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and was thrown thirty to forty feet before it came to rest on its side in front of his M915. Ricketts then turned his truck into the median to go around the left of the burning bus and became mired in the mud. Immediately his truck became engulfed in small arms fire. Rounds ricocheted off the door and shredded his left tires. They were trapped. Two well aimed armored piercing rounds penetrated the door; one hitting Ricketts’ left leg stopping short of his testicles. It filled his body with searing pain and he screamed to his co-driver, SPC Ricky Delancey, “I’m hit.” Ricketts and his co-driver made an odd pair. Ricketts was a muscular prison guard who played a guitar in a rock and roll band while the younger and shorter Delancey reminded his friends of Sleepy in the “Seven Dwarfs.” The athletic Ricketts could move his legs and his survival then depended upon his friend. Delancey grabbed the microphone and handed it to Ricketts who then screamed into the radio with pain, “I’m hit, I’m hit. It hurts.”<sup>20</sup>

That pleading voice coming from a pillar of strength sent shock waves through the convoy. Beck and Bloebaum’s M915 had come to a halt at the left edge of the pavement

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<sup>18</sup> Torres interview and video; Gilkey, “Narrative;” Van Roekel email, October 24, November 18 and 19, 2006; and Van Roekel, Higgins, and Torres interview, 28 March 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Torres video; Van Roekel email, October 24, November 18 and 19, 2006;.

<sup>20</sup> Gilkey, “Narrative;” and Hynes, “Under Fire.”

and could see Ricketts' truck. At first, Beck assumed the worst and thought the voice was her fiancé's. She then realized that whose voice it really was and thought it was the worst screaming she had heard in her life. SPC Michael Shrapels in the second to last M915 thought "it was scariest thing in the world. It sounded just like a child screaming for his mother." SSG Uhl by then isolated from his convoy heard the voice and felt completely helpless to do anything. The other problem was that Ricketts' tied up the radio and no one else could talk.<sup>21</sup>

Further south in the northbound convoy, contract driver Ron Hart watched the spectacle ahead of him. Ron had retired from the Army as a sergeant first class and was not the poster image of a good soldier; but he was dependable, a hell of a field soldier and knew the infantry. He had worked as a contractor for MPRI as an observer/controller in Kuwait until he realized he could make more money driving trucks. In his twenty years in the infantry, he had never seen combat but ahead of him, he could see a big cloud of dust from the IED that flipped the AAFES bus, then his convoy bunched up and came to a halt. He could hear the gun fire and saw the rising black column of smoke from the burning tractor attesting to the beating the vehicles in the front of the convoy were taking. Suddenly, a bullet shattered his left mirror and side door window passing just an inch above his left shoulder. It was one single round so his military training caused him to assume it came from a sniper. He thought, "I better lay down here." He wanted the sniper to think he had hit him. He summed up what every unarmed civilian driver felt at that moment, "I was scared shitless." Hart then saw Regulator 2 drive forward with its gunner firing his .50.<sup>22</sup>

SPC John Harris and SPC Jacob Graff listened to Ricketts in the green truck right behind Regulator 2 in the middle of the convoy. They were wondering what was going on and why were the other drivers not trying to get out of the kill zone as they were supposed to. Sitting in the kill zone was definitely not a good idea. Graff and Harris debated over what to do next when looking past his buddy, Harris saw an insurgent popping up and down.

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<sup>21</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Under Fire."

<sup>22</sup> Hart interview.

He pointed him out to Graff sitting in the driver's seat closest to the enemy side. Graff turned and did not see him. Then Harris saw gun smoke rising from a patch of tall grass and as he pointed Graff fired off seven or eight shots into the area and that put a halt to any small arms fire coming from that direction. Looking ahead of them, they saw the civilian drivers climbing out of their vehicles and either hiding behind the wheels or in the ditch along side the road. Suddenly rounds from their left front struck their truck. One passed through the windshield and just missed Graff's ear. Then Graff realized, "This is real. Oh my God, is this really happening?" He could not believe what was happening. He could also see SPC Brandon Dettman on Regulator 2 having trouble firing off more than two or three rounds with his .50 before it jammed as they drove ahead.<sup>23</sup>

Dettman in Regulator 2 was the first to hear the cracking of small arms up ahead. SGT Jonathan Kennedy, the NCOIC of Regulator 2, then heard over the radio, "Contact Left," and acknowledged the message. He then told his driver, SPC Ryan Hubbard, to pull over in the southbound lane and drive forward into position to form a gun shield for the convoy. Regulator 2, the seventeenth vehicle in the convoy, drove across the median ahead of Beck and Bloemaun's vehicle, five vehicles ahead. The crew asked Dettman where the shots were coming from. All the enemy fire seemed to be concentrating on the green trucks and gun trucks. He saw muzzle flashes originating from the two-story brick house to his left and fired his .50 in that direction.<sup>24</sup>

The HMMWV gun truck stopped and the crew heard the pinging of rounds hitting their armor as Regulator 2 took a beating from small arms fire. Its add-on armor was unlike that of the M1114s; there were gaps and one was in front of the dash. One round penetrated that gap and hit Hubbard in the abdomen just below the body armor. He said he was hit and Kennedy began checking for the wound but could not find it. When Hubbard slumped forward the body armor covered it. He passed out so Kennedy poured water on him and Hubbard woke up. He said he was shot. Kennedy lifted up the body armor and saw a pool of blood. Meanwhile, Dettman fired off bursts of his .50 at the

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<sup>23</sup> Hynes, "Under Fire."

<sup>24</sup> SCT Jonathan Kennedy and SPC Brandon Dettman interview by 2LT Gilkey and Killblane, 20 March 2005, and Gilkey, "Narrative."

two-story house, but the timing was also off and the .50 jammed, so he picked up his M16 and fired. He saw black clad militia crouching around the two blue-green warehouses which were several hundred meters behind the two-story house. Dettman reloaded another magazine in his M16 when white smoke came pouring out from under the dash. At that time, Graff further back saw Dettman disappear from the turret.<sup>25</sup>

Another round had penetrated a gap in Regulator 2's armor and hit the fire extinguisher filling the compartment with white smoke and greater confusion. Kennedy thought the rounds had hit his engine and set it on fire. He made the decision to get his gun truck out of there. He told Hubbard to put the HMMWV in reverse, but Hubbard kept fading in and out of consciousness. Hubbard started backing the HMMWV up when he passed out. Kennedy then reached over with his left leg, straddling the center of the HMMWV, pressed on the accelerator and steered. Kennedy also heard a grinding noise from the transmission as they backed down the southbound lane. Dettman had fired off two magazines from his M16 and about 60 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition. Ron Hart saw the gun truck move back with smoke coming out of the turret. He asked himself, "Where's the gunner?" This was not a good sign and he thought, "The shit is getting to hit the fan. Awe shit, what is going on now?" Regulator 2 drove all the way back to the rear bobtail and stopped still facing the enemy.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile up ahead, Delancey heard the low thud of an explosion followed by a second round which exploded close to his vehicle. "Mortars," he thought. The third round exploded on the hood right in front of his windshield. Beck, five vehicles back, saw the cloud of smoke rise up from his vehicle. The blast had blown the console into Delancey's lap, knocking him back and out of his seat. He then felt burning pain in his right shoulder and the shattered glass cut his face. The detached console had also landed on Ricketts' leg pinning him to the floor. He could not feel his legs any more nor could he move. He heard Delancey screaming that he could not see. Just as Delancey sat back up, a round pierced the left front of his helmet, grazing the skin just above the left eye

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<sup>25</sup> Kennedy and Dettman interview, and Gilkey, "Narrative."

<sup>26</sup> Hart interview ; Kennedy and Dettman interview; Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Under Fire."

and exited out the back of his helmet. A second round punched through the right rear of his helmet. He screamed he was shot in the head. Ricketts saw that his friend's face was covered with blood.<sup>27</sup>

Delancey looked at Ricketts and said with despair, "We are going to die." Ricketts looked back at him and acknowledged, "I know." Delancey looked up out the window and saw four or five insurgents bounding from berm to berm toward his disabled truck. He grew angry at the prospect of dying and thought he might take a few of the enemy with him. He said, "Fuck," leaned back and kicked out the rest of the shattered windshield then crawled out onto the smoking hood. He saw between four and five insurgents shooting at him from a berm. He then opened fire with his SAW. Not as many fired back after that. He fired another burst with anger until there was no more return fire. Witnesses said he hit two to five insurgents. In spite of their losses, the initial insurgents still had both the northbound and southbound convoys trapped in the kill zone. Success was still within their grasp.<sup>28</sup>

Over across the median, only two gun trucks defended the stalled southbound convoy. Within the first two minutes of the ambush, the enemy had fired over 12 RPGs but fortunately only hit two trucks. Stallion 33C guarded the rear of the convoy and Stallion 33B sat in the middle. It would be a matter of time before the insurgents destroyed most of the trucks by fire and assault. Several insurgents maneuvered past Stallion 33B toward front half of the convoy to irrigation ditch that paralleled the road and yelled out a loud, "Allahu Akbar!" as they prepared to overrun the stranded white trucks.<sup>29</sup>

As soon as SSG Nein saw the ambush from behind the southbound convoy, he rushed his Raven 42 patrol across the median to the northbound lane to race past the convoy passing Stallion 33C parked on the shoulder of the road where they returned fire on the enemy. Nein's intent was to take the initiative away from the enemy. He recognized that this was

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<sup>27</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" Hynes, "Under Fire;" and CPT Kevin Hynes, "Nebraskans kept cool during heat of ambush," *Prairie Soldier*, April 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Nebraskans."

the exact same area that a convoy had been hit two days before. He knew there was an access road up ahead. As he approached the turn, he saw about ten insurgents hiding behind a little scrub of orchard trees that paralleled the access road. He assumed that the access road was the flank of the kill zone and told his driver SGT Morris to take the right and they would flank the enemy. Morris passed the halted tractors and trailers until he found a gap. The MPs saw the civilian drivers climbing out of their vehicles. The MPs pulled out between the convoy and the enemy and drove down the southbound lane at about three minutes into the ambush. Ahead of them trucks were twisted and turned in a herringbone manner. Raven 42's gunners blazed away at the enemy as they raced ahead. SPC Ordunez in the second M1114, Raven 42B, had the choice of the Mk19 grenade launcher, M240B or M249 SAW. He was firing his M240B. An Iraqi seeing them yelled out in Arabic, "Here they come." Unknown to Raven 42, they drove up right after the insurgents had yelled, "Allahu Akbar," thus disrupting their assault.<sup>30</sup>

Raven 42C raced to the intersection through a hail of RPK machinegun fire and RPGs. RPK and AK rounds hit the windshield and grill of the HMMWV. Nein realized that there were far more than just ten insurgents. Immediately after assessing the situation, he called the relay station, call sign "Handcuff," for close air support. He wanted Apache attack helicopters as back up. When Raven 42C reached the road to make the right turn, an RPG struck the passenger door and the explosion lifted the vehicle up off the ground and moved it sideways. Nein turned around to check on his gunner, SPC Cooper. Cooper had collapsed face down behind Nein's seat with his head hanging in the foot well. SPC Ashley Pullen driving Raven 42B behind them saw the explosion and hit her brakes. She thought, "Oh shit! Cooper's there and I don't see him." Cooper was usually the gunner of her truck. Nein shook Cooper but he did not answer. Assuming he was dead, Nein started to climb over him to get up in the turret and man the .50. Suddenly, Cooper jumped up and said he was alright then climbed back into the turret. Seeing that

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<sup>29</sup> Henry J. Dordes, "Nebraska Guard unit recalls ambush in Iraq," *World-Herald*, May 29, 2005; Gilkey, "Narrative;" and captured Iraqi video.

<sup>30</sup> Nein interview, Morris interview and SPC Jesse Ordunez interview by Tom Brusino at Ft Leavenworth, KS, 18 July 2004. The timer on the captured Iraqi video showed all three Raven 42 M1114s driving past ten trucks in front of the camera man at about two minutes into the fight. The video had started right after the ambush began.

Raven 42C was still moving, Pullen thought, “Okay, they’re fine,” and followed. As soon as Raven 42C turned west on the dirt road, Nein turned back to facing the front and saw seven parked cars with all four doors open and four of their trunks open. He quickly did the math and realized that there could be up to 28 insurgents in the area. He again called Handcuff telling them he needed close air immediately then told Morris to drive about 200 meters down the road and stop. Raven 42B followed closely about 30 yards behind with Raven 42A behind it with Ordunez blazing away with his SAW. SGT Rivera in Raven 42A had seen the insurgents in a canal that paralleled the main road fire the RPG at Nein’s vehicle.<sup>31</sup>

Heading down the access road, Nein told his driver, SGT Morris, to stop next to the main ditch so they could lay down flanking fire. When Raven 42C came to a stop, Nein saw that his HMMWV was pretty shot up and oil was spraying on the windshield. He then saw an insurgent in the field getting ready to fire an RPG at them, so he and Morris climbed out of the vehicle to fire back with their M4 carbines. Nein heard rounds ping off his vehicle. SGT Hester’s Raven 42B with the Mk19 had halted about 50 meters behind Nein and SGT Rivera’s Raven 42A with the M2 halted about 50 meters behind Hester. The access road was flanked by tall berms of earth and an orchard and smaller canal paralleled the north side of the access road. Rivera’s team had the best field of fire down the main canal that paralleled the main road and began engaging the insurgents. They likewise received the fury of the enemy’s fire.<sup>32</sup>

The gunners in the turrets began engaging the enemy while SSG Nein, SGT Hester, and SGT Morris came on line along in front of their vehicles to return fire. This was a drill they had rehearsed. SPC Pullen climbed out and went behind the left rear of her vehicle to fire as she had been taught. She was relatively new to the unit. She fired off a clip and tossed it through her open door because she had been told the insurgents liked to rig explosives to dropped magazines.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Nein interview, Morris interview and SPC Ashley Pullen interview by Tom Bruscino, at Ft Leavenworth, KS, 16 August 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Nein interview, Morris interview and Pullen interview.

<sup>33</sup> Nein interview, Morris interview and Pullen interview.

Some of the insurgents behind the irrigation ditches realized they had been flanked and tried to escape. Nein saw about four in the canal and one behind a car parallel to the road shooting at SPC William Haynes, the gunner in Rivera's gun truck. Then Cooper in the turret of Raven 42C yelled down that there was an Iraqi firing from the berm behind him, "Somebody throw a grenade over there." Nein went over and climbed up the 10-foot high berm. At the same time, Pullen passed him going to Hester's side. She asked her team leader, "What are we doing?" Pullen then heard yelling on her handheld radio in the HMMWV and told Hester she was going to find out the noise was. She reached through the passenger door and picked up the radio then stood there listening to Mike yelling that he needed help and that everyone was down. She looked down the road and so no one but Rivera rolling on the ground in the mud. She then looked up and saw Nein throw a grenade over the south berm.<sup>34</sup>

Pullen was having trouble understanding Mike and told him to go to his SINCGARS. At the same time, Hester came back for more 40mm rounds. Pullen then saw Nein climb back up the berm to make sure the insurgent was dead. The insurgent was missing, but Nein saw the cartridges of where the insurgent had fired an RPK. Nein assumed he had fallen into the wet canal that paralleled the access road, so his rear was clear. Nein then turned back to the main fight north of the access road all the while enemy fire continued. Pullen then heard Mike clearly and told him she was on her way. Hester had returned to the berm so Pullen yelled over to SSG Nein, "SGT Rivera is down, everybody's down and Mike needs help. I'm going." Nein looked down the road to Rivera's location but saw who he thought was PFC Brian Mack, Rivera's driver, lying on the ground. They were taking a beating from enemy fire. He told Pullen, "Okay, you do what you got to do," then went running back to Hester's position on the north berm.<sup>35</sup>

Right after Raven 42A had stopped adjacent to the irrigation ditch that paralleled the main road, SGT Rivera, SPC Mack, and SPC Mike dismounted and took cover behind

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<sup>34</sup> Nein interview.

<sup>35</sup> Nein interview and Pullen interview.

their vehicle to engage the insurgents in the irrigation ditch while SPC Haynes blazed away with his .50 in the turret. Mack, the combat medic, fired all his 9mm rounds then picked up Mack's M4 and fired it. Mack was firing Haynes' SAW. Shortly after, Mack was shot in the arm. Mike then pulled Mack to cover halfway under his vehicle. Moments later, Rivera was hit in the lower torso. Since both had been behind the vehicle, Mike realized that they were taking fire from the south side of the road. At that distance from the two-story house, the berm did not offer Raven 42A as much cover from fire as it did the other two gun trucks closer to it. Mike also pulled Rivera to a covered position under the vehicle and returned fire in that direction. While he was firing to his rear, a round similarly hit Haynes in the back. Haynes stopped firing to bandaged his own wounds. Mike picked up the SAW and fired into the irrigation ditch until Haynes could get back up behind his .50. It was at that time that Mike radioed Pullen that nearly everyone was a casualty.<sup>36</sup>

Upon hearing the news of casualties, Nein realized that his small force was severely outnumbered and it occurred to him that there was a good chance his force could get overrun. He worried that if the enemy overran Rivera's position so far away that they could turn the .50 on them. The situation looked grim. He grabbed the radio and told Handcuff that they were fighting a platoon-sized force or larger and needed close air support immediately. The situation looked so desperate that he even considered destroying his Blue Force Tracker. Nein returned to the firing line and began to take fire from the two-story house behind him to the south of the access road. It finally dawned on him that he was not on the flank of the enemy but in the middle of the kill zone.<sup>37</sup>

After what seemed like 10 to 15 minutes fighting on the access road, the situation looked desperate and Nein considered a bold and audacious attack on the enemy to throw them on the defensive. Nein went over and told SPC Ordunez, the gunner on Hester's vehicle, to fire his Mk19 into the house. He fired off between 10 to 15 rounds but it had no effect on the enemy gunner. Ordunez then fired his SAW until a round knocked it out of his hands

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<sup>36</sup> Minor, "Historical summary."

<sup>37</sup> Nein interview and Morris interview.

into the HMMWV. Ordunez looked behind him and saw an Iraqi with an RPK machinegun pointed at him about 15 meters away on top of the berm. Ordunez thought, "This is end, there is no way out." He then spun his 240B around and fired it at him. Meanwhile, Nein walked back to the firing line, stood up and then jumped into the canal that paralleled the access road and yelled, "I need a 203 down here!" Hester with the M203 joined him. Morris intuitively followed along the road to the knowing they needed overhead cover.<sup>38</sup>

Nein with an M4 on the left and Hester with an M203 on the right advanced along the ditch. Both had two hand grenades each. Something else they had discussed before was that if they ever had to go head-to-head with the enemy to do so square up that way the body armor would protect them. The side of the body armor was weak where the Kevlar material overlapped. Hester fired two grenade rounds from M203 at the enemy about 50 meters away but the rounds went over them. Nein told her that they had to keep going forward. They would have to throw had grenades instead. Hester would fire over Nein's shoulder while he threw grenades then advance and clear out the ditch. He threw his two grenades and Hester handed him one and ended up throwing one herself. At one point an Iraqi 20 yards away sprayed his AK at them from the hip. Rounds hit all around them but Nein could not believe he missed. It usually took four rounds of 5.56mm (just a little larger than a .22 caliber) to drop the Iraqis. They killed four Iraqis in the canal that led to the main canal.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, Pullen had climbed in her driver seat and yelled up to her gunner, Ordunez, that they were going to help Rivera. She then threw the vehicle in reverse and spun back around facing the opposite direction then put it in forward and drove close to Rivera. While Nein and Hester approached the main canal, Raven 42B paralleled them with Ordunez firing over Morris' head. They halted when they reached Rivera's vehicle.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Nein interview, Morris interview and Ordunez interview.

<sup>39</sup> Nein interview and Morris interview.

<sup>40</sup> Pullen interview and Ordunez interview.

Pullen climbed out of her vehicle on the main enemy contact side and ran to Rivera with her M4 in hand. They were still under heavy enemy fire so she sat next to Rivera with the back of her body armor toward the enemy. She saw Mike and asked, “Mike, what do you need me to do?” He told her, “Tend to Rivera. I’ve got everything else covered.” She then looked at Rivera and asked where he hurt. Pullen realized that she needed bandages and since Rivera did not have his weapon she left him hers. Armed with her 9mm Beretta, she ran back to her vehicle and brought back her combat life saver bag not thinking that there was one in the vehicle next to her. She dumped out the contents on the road. Rivera screamed that he could not feel his legs. She told him to calm down and that he needed to help her. He helped her take off his body armor and she pushed up his shirt. She saw that he was bleeding from a hole in his stomach and saw a lot of blood everywhere. She told him that she needed to roll him over and check for an exit wound. She found one. She then heard Mike yell into the radio, “AT4! Backblast area! Clear!” Pullen threw herself over Rivera’s body to shield it because she was so close to Mike that she could reach out and touch him. He fired the AT4 at the two-story house that was causing most of the trouble.<sup>41</sup>

As the evidence would later show, around 50 insurgents had laid an L-shaped ambush oriented to the north with the base of the “L” across the road about where the middle of the 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy halted. The access road divided the kill zone in two parts and Nein was looking at about 35 insurgents to the north engaging the southbound convoy and about 15 behind him to the south engaging the northbound convoy. The south half of the ambush began with a couple insurgents firing from a different two-story house to the west of the road followed by fire from about five insurgents behind berms to the south of the house. After a while about six insurgents behind the house began to fire on the rear half of the 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy. There were two insurgents across the street forming the “L.” The bulk of the enemy fire was concentrated near the access road where the two convoys

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<sup>41</sup> Pullen interview.

met. Amazingly, in the heat of battle the Soldiers of the two convoys had not seen each other.<sup>42</sup>

From the south, the 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy heard the intensity of the gun battle on the access road, but they still had their own fight. Bullets zipped through Ron Hart's truck. He was drawing fire from the left, so he decided to drive around to the right and get behind the container trucks. The only trucks with containers were Army green trucks. The white trucks pulled thin-skinned vans and flat bed trailers. He pulled up and stopped beside the green truck but saw everyone behind him had followed. Where he had stopped left the others exposed. He decided to drive further up to the forward-most green truck so to allow the others to find cover behind the other green trucks. He passed two green trucks and pulled up to right of Ricketts' truck. He threw the air brakes on and climbed out of his truck and to get down behind the cover of the duels of the green truck, but ran into Delancey just as he was climbing out of his truck. The young Soldier's face was covered with blood and he still had the SAW in his hand.<sup>43</sup>

When Hart saw Delancey, he lost his fear and forgot he was a civilian. It kicked in his head that he was a platoon sergeant again and that Delancey was one of his Soldiers. The old retired infantry sergeant first class got mad and told Delancey to get his ass down. "Give me that SAW." Delancey told him that his partner was still in the truck. Hart told the young Soldier that there was nothing he can do for Ricketts right then, but "we need to kill these bastards before they kill us." Hart then picked up the SAW and took up a firing position behind first set of duels on the tractor on the frame of the tractor and below the trailer. It gave him the best amount of protection and good field of fire. He fired at all windows of the two-story house where he thought the sniper was. He then fired at water tower. He fired at anything that he suspected anything looked like a sniper position.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> "Battle of Bismarck Green Tab AAR," 106<sup>th</sup> Trans Bn. The numbers of enemy and their locations south of the access road were based upon three days of interview of the 518<sup>th</sup> and 1075<sup>th</sup> soldiers by 2LT Charles Gilkey and Richard Killblane immediately after their return from the convoy.

<sup>43</sup> Hart interview and Hynes, "Nebraskans."

After firing off the first 200 rounds, Hart asked Delancey if he had any more ammunition. Delancey said, “Up in the cab.” Hart went up to the cab and grabbed one can of ammunition and hoped it was not M16. He heard Ricketts moaning and told him “Just hang on. We will get you out as soon as we can. Don’t move around.” Hart then went back to his position and loaded the belt directly into the SAW. Delancey wanted to show him how to load the plastic drum on the side of the SAW. Hart said, “Don’t worry about that I already know how to do it. We don’t need to be pretty right now.”<sup>45</sup>

Six Iraqis popped up along the berm that paralleled the left side of the road and were running away toward where they could shoot at the rear of the convoy. They were wearing the Iraqi Police uniforms: blue shirt, black Kevlar vest and black helmet. It puzzled Hart but he thought, “They are in the wrong location,” so he decided to fire them up. He fired off another 100 round belt. He did not know if he hit anyone, but when he stopped firing, “they weren’t running anymore.” He heard something going on to his right side and saw a Soldier climbing into the cab of the truck. Hart continued to provide covering fire with the SAW. It was SPC Jenny Beck, the driver of the next M915 in line behind Ricketts’. The drivers were beginning to take decisive action.<sup>46</sup>

SSG Uhl and SPC Bos had waited at the rally point and hoped the remainder of the trucks would start coming out of the kill zone, but for the longest time, none followed. Uhl turned to Bos and said, “We have to go back.” This violated their doctrine but he had to do something. So Bos skillfully turned his rig around and Uhl radioed the others that he was driving back into the kill zone. Suddenly, Beck called back and asked, “Can we come out to you?”<sup>47</sup>

Beck had gone through a roller coaster ride of emotions. First she had mistaken Ricketts’ voice as that of her fiancé, SPC Bos. She was panicky until she realized who it really was. She then saw the mortar round hit Ricketts’ truck and she called them on the radio.

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<sup>44</sup> Hart interview.

<sup>45</sup> Hart interview.

<sup>46</sup> Hart interview.

<sup>47</sup> Gilkey, “Narrative;” and Hynes, “Nebraskans.”

She heard nothing. She had a sinking feeling in her stomach fearing the worst had happened. Tears welled up in her eyes and Bloebaum comforted her saying, "It's okay. They'll be fine." He added, "Don't worry of it. Let's get out of here." With that he began typing a request for medevac on his MTS and sent their grid coordinates. Both of them let the air out of their seats to let them sit lower behind the door armor. Bloebaum then came up with a plan.<sup>48</sup>

He knew that to get convoy vehicles moving, a green truck would have to lead them out. He told Beck, "We've got to get these white trucks out of our way. We've got to get the ones behind us back up. That way, we can back up and go around the rest of the whites to Ricketts and Delancey." About that time, Graff called over the radio asking if there was a way to drive around the traffic jam. That was a relief for Beck.<sup>49</sup>

Five vehicles back, Graff and Harris decided to clear the kill zone on their own. Their truck crawled forward looking for an opening on the right but that escape route was blocked. As they moved, enemy fire increased. Just as they were about to turn to the left, a burst of machinegun fire hit their cab. Graff looked over at Harris and he was holding his neck. One round had penetrated the windshield, hit the lip of Harris' helmet, shattering and sending fragments of the helmet and bullet down his face and neck, knocking him against the passenger door. Harris lay there trying to clear the cob webs out of his mind when he felt something cold and wet splash against his hand. He knew it was blood. This brought him a little back to his senses and he reached up and pinched off his carotid artery. He then saw Graff looking at him. Unable to speak, Harris motioned to the front. Graff knew what it meant. He had to get his friend quickly out of the kill zone to safety where he could be medevaced or he would die.<sup>50</sup>

Graff pushed on the accelerator and maneuvered around the right side of the convoy. Upon coming abreast of Ricketts' vehicle he pushed the smoldering bus out of the way and drove into the southbound lane drawing a hail of small arms fire. They hit the truck

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<sup>48</sup> Hynes, "Nebraskans."

<sup>49</sup> Hynes, "Nebraskans."

<sup>50</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Under Fire."

sounding like popcorn. Graff was driving through the center and most intense part of the kill zone. Chunks of fiberglass from the hood of his truck were flying everywhere as rounds tore it apart. A round passed through the side window striking him in the shoulder. Graff only felt a tug and reached up underneath his deltoid armor and drew back a bloody hand. He also heard the hiss of an air leak and feared rounds had punctured an air line and his trailer brakes might lock up. Unknown to him the hiss came from his tires. He pushed his truck on as hard as he could and cleared the kill zone.<sup>51</sup>

Once Graff's vehicle left, the white trucks behind Beck and Bloebaum had room to back up. Beck hung out the door and motioned the DOD drivers behind her to back up. They understood and were still in their cabs. The first DOD driver put his rig in reverse, backed up and then drove around the convoy. Others followed. After four more vehicles passed by, Van Reokel in the lead gun truck, Regulator 1, ordered Higgins to follow them to the rally point, "Let's get moving, let's get moving!" At 1157 hours, they cleared the kill zone. They had spent around 15 minutes near the center of the kill zone and had fired off a total of 30 magazines of M16, two drums of M249 SAW ammunition and 200 rounds of .50 caliber.<sup>52</sup>

As soon as room opened up behind Beck and Bloebaum, Uhl came over the radio saying he was coming back. Bloebaum told Beck to tell Uhl to stop, turn around and set up a casualty collection point. He knew if Uhl reentered the kill zone, there would be no one to stop the other trucks coming out. They would just keep driving down the road. Beck radioed Uhl, "Don't come back. Can we come out where you are at?" Relieved, Uhl found her question funny. That is what he had wanted them to do. He said, "Yes, yes. Get out here." Uhl then ordered Bos to turn his truck around and return to the spot where he originally stopped.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Under Fire."

<sup>52</sup> Van Reokel, Higgins and Torres interview; Gilkey, "Narrative;" Hynes, "Nebraskans;" and Torres video.

<sup>53</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Nebraskans."

Graff pulled up next to Uhl with fluid spraying out of his tractor. Graff jumped out and yelled that Harris was hurt. Uhl jumped from his truck and ran to Harris' door and opened it to see the young Soldier with blood covering his face. He looked at the sergeant as if to ask how he was. He then gritted his teeth and rolled his eyes. He tossed his combat life saver bag to Bos who helped Graff pull Harris from the cab and set him down against the wheel of his truck. Bos began treating his wounds while Uhl radioed for a medevac.<sup>54</sup>

Back in the kill zone, Bloebaum told Beck to pull her rig up to the right of Hart's. They crept forward about 15 mph when a Third Country National jumped up the running board next to her door to show her the wound in his arm. She opened the door and he crawled in behind her next to the MTS. Reaching Hart's vehicle, she then jumped out of cab and walked around to Ricketts' truck still under fire. Upon seeing her, Delancey struggled to his feet and met her. He told her to get them out of there and that Ricketts was still in the truck. She told him to get in her truck. Bloebaum had just opened the door to get out when Delancey climbed up and jumped in. The assistant convoy commander then treated Delancey's wounds and sent more MTS messages.<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile, Beck opened the passenger door and looked in the cab at Ricketts lying helplessly on the floor board pinned under the wreckage of the console. He raised his head off the seat and looked surprised to see her. He told her, "I'm stuck." She told him, "I don't care. You're getting out of there." She reached in and began pulling. Trapped under the console, he would not budge. She cursed at him and he said, "I can't move." It seemed the harder she pulled the tighter he became lodged under the console. She yelled at him, "We're not leaving you here. If you're not doing it for yourself, you're doing it for me. You're not staying here." He said, "Okay, but my legs are stuck...my right leg is stuck and I'm shot in the left leg." She told him to push with his good leg no matter how much it hurt. She counted to three and she strained with all her strength. Ricketts finally started moving. She now had a problem in that she could not hold Ricketts up.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Hynes, "Nebraskans."

<sup>55</sup> Hynes, "Nebraskans."

<sup>56</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Nebraskans."

When Hart looked over again, he saw Beck pulling Ricketts out. She appeared excited and out breath, but in control. Afraid she would drop Ricketts, Beck asked Hart if he could help pull Ricketts out of the cab and drag him around to the other side of his truck. So Hart laid the SAW down near the rear duels and the two lowered Ricketts to the ground then they dragged Ricketts by the collar. Still under fire, Ricketts then rolled over on his stomach and started to crawl so Hart could pull him a little faster. About that time, Stallion 33A drove by heading north to the access road.<sup>57</sup>

Beck then climbed half way in her cab when she saw that her truck was full with three people in the cab. She turned around looked down and told Hart she had no more room in her truck. She felt bad about having to leave him. Ricketts was trying to climb into the cab when she told him that there was not room. He understood, climbed down and crawled under a trailer. She said someone else would come and pick Ricketts up. She then asked Hart if he had picked up Ricketts' M16. She did not want to leave any weapons around. He said no and she then asked if he could go get it. He responded, "Right, no problem." She then climbed back in her cab and radioed the trucks behind her to pick up Ricketts. She stepped down again to tell Hart to hold that position until one of the drivers behind her recovered Ricketts. Beck signaled the civilian drivers behind her to get ready to go, mounted, and drove her M915 into the median and out of the kill zone with several other drivers following. She radioed to SPC Kelly Kinzer and SPC Paul Rullo that she had Delancey, was heading north and for them to pick Ricketts up. They misunderstood that she had Ricketts. Uhl also misunderstood her. Kinzer and Rullo followed her out of the kill zone as Ricketts watched the column of trucks pass. A strange sense of ease came over him. He did not want to stop any of them because they were not supposed to stop in the kill zone. He would have felt terrible if someone was killed on his account. A good portion of the 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy had finally cleared the kill zone.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Hart interview; Hynes, "Nebraskans;" and videos PHOT0021 and 1075BOB shot from digital cameras by two different DOD drivers.

<sup>58</sup> Hart interview; Hynes, "Nebraskans;" and DOD video.

After the first four trucks had driven forward behind Graff, Regulator 1 raced ahead of the vehicles past the AAFES convoy on their left and after a minute slowed down unable to see the vehicles behind it. An RPG streaked at it and the crew returned fire. They accelerated again and after less than a minute of driving, Van Roekel asked, "Is the driver behind us?" Higgins answered, "No." "Then why are you driving then?" Higgins responded, "You told me to get out of the fucking kill zone." "So where is the convoy?" By their doctrine they were supposed to establish the rally point three to six miles down the road out of the range of enemy weapons, but they had no idea that Uhl had set it up just one mile from the kill zone.<sup>59</sup>

Higgins then slowed her HMMWV to a stop and realized that no one was behind them. They had not even seen Uhl's M915 when they passed it. They then checked their status of ammunition and SFC Ramero stepped out to look for the convoy. Two minutes later they turned around and drove back toward the kill zone. They found Graff and Uhl's M915s parked side-by-side. The crew dismounted and Torres and Higgins went over to provide medical treatment to Harris. A few minutes later the white trucks pulled up. Refusing treatment, Graf walked to southbound lane and waved at an approaching HET convoy to stop.<sup>60</sup>

About 20 minutes after the ambush began, SSG Shirley Jacobs' southbound convoy of the 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon, 96<sup>th</sup> HET heading from ANACONDA to SCANIA neared the kill zone from the north. Her call sign was "Dragon 47." This was SSG Jacobs' first time as convoy commander. Her convoy included seven green HETs, 14 white HETs, three gun trucks, a contact truck with spare parts and a wrecker, for a total of 25 vehicles. Off in the distance, Jacobs saw smoke which was a common sight in Iraq. Locals burned everything. She then heard on the Sheriff net about an ambush, but when she plotted the ambush grid on her route map, it was not in the direction she headed. She had the wrong grid coordinates so she did not think there was any trouble up ahead.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Torres video.

<sup>60</sup> Torres video and Hynes, "Nebraskans."

<sup>61</sup> Jacobs interview, and Hammons, sworn statement.

She then called “Yellow Jacket,” her escort from A Battery, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 178<sup>th</sup> FA on the SINCGARS, “I can hear them on the SINCGARS. We’re close.” As her convoy neared the smoke, Jacobs saw three parked M915s about 300 meters ahead. Smoke was coming from the right hand side of the road behind them. She planned to stop and help and as soon as she passed the first M915, she saw a Soldier bleeding from a head wound, a sergeant and a female Soldier standing next to him. Jacobs pulled up next to the second M915 and stopped.<sup>62</sup>

Jacobs then instructed her convoy to go into a box formation. Her green HETs alternated pulling in left and right behind the vehicle. The white HETs followed the green HET in front of it. The gun trucks took up security around the box. She had been a drill instructor at Fort Jackson and taught basic training Soldiers the box formation. She called her Soldiers on the SINCGARS, “Get out of the trucks and pull security. Do not go to the right side.” From the sound of gun fire, she could tell that her right side was exposed to fire. The ambush sounded like the gun fire she heard on firing ranges while a drill instructor. As soon as the Third Country Nationals climbed out of the vehicles, the NCOs knew to herd them into the center of the box.<sup>63</sup>

Graff yelled over that his convoy needed medics and combat life savers. SSG Jacobs, PFC Christy Kirkland, the combat life saver, and SGT Eddie Munos, the driver, climbed out of her lead HET and went over to the wounded Soldier in front of the lead vehicle. About that time the gun fire stopped. Jacobs saw an Apache helicopter fly overhead. Kirkland automatically started triaging the wounded. Jacobs asked Uhl, “How many are hit, how many vehicles in your convoy? Have you called for a medevac?” Visibly shaken, Uhl answered, “There are three or four people that I know of.” He also told her how many vehicles he had and he had already called for a medevac.<sup>64</sup>

Up until then, Stallion 33C was under fire in the rear of the AAFES convoy when SGT Ricky D. Burke, the vehicle commander, heard that Stallion 33B was receiving heavier

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<sup>62</sup> Jacobs interview.

<sup>63</sup> Jacobs interview.

<sup>64</sup> Jacobs interview and Hynes, “Nebraskans.”

fire up front. Burke's and his .50 gunner, SPC Kirby Gregory, suppressed much of the enemy fire. About the same time, Raven 42 radioed that they were taking fire from both sides and needed help. By that time, Jacobs' HET convoy had pulled up so Burke knew his rear was covered and he instructed SGT Mathew T. Simpson to drive their M1114 to the front of the convoy. They drove down the northbound lane behind the vehicles, passed the burning Reefer trailer, crossed over into the southbound lane again and saw the M1114s on the access road then drove to help them.<sup>65</sup>

Much earlier, Regulator 3 in the rear of the 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy heard gun fire to their left front but could not see where it was coming from. They could hear the sound of gun fire getting closer and about two or three seconds later, rounds started pinging off their HMMWV. A heavy volume of fire flattened three of its tires and hit its ballistic windshield. The crew still could not see any enemy to engage. They then heard Ricketts scream on the radio, "I've been hit, I've been hit!" SSG Aaron Castro on the .50 returned fire in the direction he heard enemy fire but his .50 also jammed after firing a few rounds. His turret also locked up and would not rotate. SGT Rondell Brown, the vehicle commander, thought they were sitting ducks and SGT Alexander Hernandez, the driver, yelled to him that they had to get out of there. Although their place was protecting the rear of the convoy, they were unable to see anything to fire at so Brown told Hernandez to drive around the right side of the convoy using the trucks as a shield just as Raven 42 and Stallion 33 had. They saw the drivers on the right side of the road hiding behind their vehicles. As they drove down the right side of the convoy they received small arms fire from the field to that direction. They returned fire and quieted that side of the road. Through the gaps they saw Regulator 2 falling back. Brown asked Hernandez, "Where are they going?" Regulator 3 returned fire and kept going until they found a gap in the convoy large enough to drive through. They nosed their HMMWV through and saw enemy fire from the direction of the warehouse and grove of trees by the access road. They felt that if they could drive to the cover of the berm, they could suppress the enemy

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<sup>65</sup>Gregory, Burke and Simpson sworn statements.

fire and protect the convoy. While they drove to it they saw three Iraqis come out of the two-story house with RPGs. They arrived right behind Stallion 33C.<sup>66</sup>

Upon reaching the access road, the crew of Regulator 3 only saw two HMMWVs parked with their crews in a fight of their own. They saw one wounded MP on the ground, Haynes firing the .50 from the turret and Mike firing the M4 from the berm. They saw Haynes get hit in the hand then he dismounted. They thought the .50 was inoperable. This was the final act in the heroic fight by the MPs of the Raven 42.<sup>67</sup>

While holding off the enemy, Haynes, on top of Raven 42C, saw SSG Nein and SGT Hester approaching along the irrigation ditch. He stopped firing his .50 and called a cease fire. About that time, Nein, Hester and Morris came over to assess the situation. SGT Hester calmly walked over while enemy fire continued and asked Pullen what she needed. Pullen was holding down a compress bandage on Rivera's stomach and said she needed another bandage. She was not combat life saver (CLS) trained and did the best she could but did not know what she was looking for in the CLS bag. For some reason she did not think to use the one on Rivera's vest. Rivera was screaming for her to get off of him because it was hurting. She fought back the tears as she tried to calm the sergeant down. She told him to think about his little son, his mother, his home and Kentucky. Hester then calmly walked over to Brown and Hernandez who had dismounted Regulator 3 and asked if they had a combat life saver on board. All were combat lifesaver qualified, so Hester told Brown, "We need a Medevac, we need a Medevac!" Brown walked back to his vehicle and called for a Medevac on his radio. While Hernandez headed toward the wounded, Brown learned that a medevac was already on the way so he took up a firing position along the berm with Castro who had already dismounted with his SAW. Pullen looked up at the nearest gun truck, Stallion 33A, and saw the driver sitting there. She yelled over at Mike, "Get him out of there and make him do something!" Mike physically hauled him out of the vehicle. SGT Burke and SGT Simpson wearing tan body armor dismounted and ran over to Pullen to render medical assistance to Rivera and

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<sup>66</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and SSG Aaron Castro, SGT Rondell Brown and SPC Alexander Hernandez interview by 2LT Charles Gilkey and Richard Killblane, at Cp NAVISTAR, Kuwait, 28 March 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Castro, Brown and Hernandez interview.

provide covering fire. She did not hear them she just saw them staring at her causing her to remark, "If you're not going to help me, go shoot somebody or something; but just don't stand there and stare at me!" They were still under fire and ran over to help Mack.<sup>68</sup>

Simpson drug Mack to the driver's side of his vehicle for cover to treat his wounds. They came under fire from the two-story building to the south. That is when they saw Mike fire the AT4 into the building. After the explosion, the crew of Regulator 3 saw six or seven Iraqis running from the house. Shortly after this, Stallion 33B arrived and provided additional .50 caliber support in the irrigation ditch. SFC Hammons and his driver, SPC Kevin R. Vogel, climbed out to load SPC Mack into their vehicle for evacuation. As Stallion 33B prepared to leave, Stallion 33A pulled up. Hammons then instructed SGT Baker in Stallion 33A to call for a medevac and establish a landing zone. As both Stallion 33A and 33B drove back to the main road, they received heavy fire from both sides of the access road. Stallion 33A fired to the north side of the road while Stallion 33A returned fire to the south side. They drove south to the check point taking fire the whole way. They established a casualty collection point and landing zone 600 to 1,000 meters south on the road. Stallion 33A and 33B found the lone Third Country National where they left him. Baker then called in the nine-line medevac. The tail end of the 1075<sup>th</sup> convoy was still ahead of them.<sup>69</sup>

While they were working on Mack, SPC Hernandez of Regulator 3 walked up wearing green body armor and asked Pullen, "What can I do to help you?" She said, "We need to move him, get him out of the mud and get him to a truck." Hernandez pulled out his Gerber knife and cut off Rivera's gear and Hernandez then helped bandage SGT Rivera's wounds while Pullen calmed him. They called SPC Mike over who then grabbed Rivera's feet, Hernandez his arms and lifted him while Pullen held the bandages. They carried him to the nearest vehicle, Stallion 33C, and started to slide him across the back seat, but there was a cooler and other trash in the way. Pullen yelled, "Get this crap out of here.

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<sup>68</sup> Hynes, "Soldiers;" Burke sworn statement and Pullen interview.

<sup>69</sup> Minor, "Historical summary;" Hammons, Vogel, Saylor, Simpson and Burke sworn statements; Kennedy interview; Dettman interview; and Castro, Brown, and Hernandez interview.

He's not going to be in any more pain than necessary." Someone came and tossed the junk out of the vehicle which took a while. Ordunez finally came over while Pullen was trying to insert an IV into Rivera. Since she was not combat life saver qualified she did not know how to, which was good. She later learned that she was not supposed to administer an IV to someone with a stomach wound. Ordunez handed Rivera the guardian angel his fiancé had mailed him for protection then looked at Pullen and with tears in his eyes asked if Rivera would be okay. Pullen told him that she would not let anything happen to him. After 20 minutes the fight had died down on the access road but it still raged over on the south half of the kill zone.<sup>70</sup>

After Beck drove off, Hart went back to Ricketts' truck, picked up the SAW and took up another firing position. Lying under Hart's trailer, Ricketts had watched the trucks roll by with none stopping. Hart remained in the firing position for five minutes until he knew Beck was safely down the road. He picked up the M16 and threw it inside his truck. He then went over to check on Ricketts and give him water. A Third Country National had shown up and was also sitting next to him. They waited for someone to come and pick up Ricketts. However, it occurred to Ricketts that the others had forgotten him.<sup>71</sup>

Beck and Bloebaum reached the casualty collection point established by Uhl. She climbed out of her cab and felt a sense of relief seeing her fiancé, Bos. The two helped Delancey out of his body armor so the combat life savers could treat his wounds. She sat by comforting him while worrying about Ricketts. Someone yelled out that Ricketts was inbound with Rullo and Kinzer. Beck and several other drivers grabbed a litter to meet the truck. To her shock, Ricketts was not in the truck. She realized they had left him behind. She was furious and communication with the rear of the convoy was bad.<sup>72</sup>

Behind Hart and Ricketts, however, remained seven white trucks, two green and the bobtail. Many of the civilian drivers were hiding in the ditch. SPC Michael Sharples, the

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<sup>70</sup> Minor, "Historical summary;" Castro, Brown, and Hernandez interview; and Pullen interview.

<sup>71</sup> Hart interview and Hynes, "Soldiers sprint through enemy fire to rescue comrade," *Prairie Soldier*, April 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Hynes, "Soldiers."

driver of the second-to-last M915, had understood the call to pick Ricketts up and had seen Rullo and Kinzer's truck slow down as it passed Hart's truck. He was glad to see the convoy finally moving again. Just to make sure that someone picked up Ricketts, he asked on the radio, "Did anybody get Sergeant Ricketts?" Someone said, "Yeah, he's here." They may have confused Ricketts with Rickey Delancey.<sup>73</sup>

About that time, an F16 jet arrived and circled overhead as a show of force. Sharples told his driver, SPC Thomas Heesacker, "Stay here. I'll be right back." Sharples climbed out of his cab and ran along the line of trucks opening the doors to check for civilian drivers. The windshields and cabs were shot up but all the drivers were taking cover in the ditches. Upon reaching the last vehicle, there was a long gap between it and other trucks. As he stepped out, gun fire opened up on his left with the rounds hitting the ground in front of him. The small arms fire made the distance between the trucks immense. He told himself that he was not going to run it alone, turned and ran back to his truck hearing a couple more rounds pop over his head.<sup>74</sup>

About the same time, Birkel sitting in the last bobtail reached for the radio and asked the crew of Regulator 2, "What's wrong with your vehicle?" They told Birkel that their transmission had been damaged. It had made a lot of noise when it drove backwards and SGT Kennedy wanted to tow it out. They pulled up behind the bobtail. While the bob tail lined up with the tow bar on the front of the HMMWV, Kennedy ran up to ask the mechanic to come out and help. Once the tow bar was hooked up, the bobtail lurched forward. A few minutes after the F16 had arrived, a pair of Apaches flew overhead and the enemy fire momentarily died down. Dettman, in the turret of the HMMWV, was still firing when he felt the tow bar jerk. Kennedy called that he needed a medevac and whined why they were not leaving. They did not have a combat life saver bag in the vehicle so Kennedy used his and Dettman's field dressing to bandage Hubbard's wound. After they pulled up about 50 feet, Kennedy heard that Regulator 3 was on its way to pick up Hubbard. While waiting, Birkel decided to climb out of the cab, go back and check the

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<sup>73</sup> Hynes, "Soldiers."

<sup>74</sup> Hynes, "Soldiers."

shot-up HMMWV for himself. It turned out that the transmission was not damaged but he learned when Hubbard slumped forward, his body put the vehicle in low gear. So they disconnected the tow bar and Birkel returned to his cab where he ran into Sharples.<sup>75</sup>

Pointing to the civilians, Sharples told him, “You need to help me get these guys out of here. There’s a big gap up there and I don’t want to do it alone. Maybe we can cover each other or something.” Wide-eyed at the suggestion, Birkel snapped back, “I’m not going to do that.” Sharples pleaded again, “C’mon man, we’re never going to get out of here if we don’t get them back in their trucks.” Birkels realized he was right and agreed then told his co-driver, Schrad, that he was going forward with Sharples. Schrad provided covering fire out the window of his truck and Dettman, in Regulator 2, laid down suppressive fire on insurgent positions in a dune and a house to their left and watched two to five insurgents drop and not get up again. The other two ran between the gaps in the trucks. Each time they drew enemy fire and Birkels was sure he was going to get hit. Soon Birkels became focused on what he was doing and blocked out the danger. He quit hearing gunfire. They reached the large gap and Sharples leaned around the nose of the truck and fired off a burst, then both sprinted across the gap. To their surprise, they drew no enemy fire this time probably because two Apache helicopters had arrived and circled overhead.<sup>76</sup>

Sharples and Birkel ran the 300 to 400 meter length of the convoy trying to get the drivers back in their trucks. Scared and unable to speak English, most of them did not initially respond to their orders and remained hidden in the ditch. Some climbed out of the ditch to hear what they had to say. It took a lot of prompting to get them in their vehicles and drive. Sharples discovered one Third Country National who had been shot in the butt hiding behind the tire and helped him into one of his friend’s truck. After getting all the drivers in their trucks, the two Americans were about to run back.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Hart interview; Kennedy and Dettman interview; Castro, Brown and Hernandez interview; Gilkey, “Narrative;” and Hynes, “Soldiers.”

<sup>76</sup> Gilkey, “Narrative.”

<sup>77</sup> Gilkey, “Narrative;” and Hynes, “Soldiers.”

Hart thought it was taking way too long for anyone to come and pick up Ricketts, so he went over to Ricketts' cab and found his Motorola. He called on the radio, "I've got a wounded Soldier. I need someone to come up here and get him." It seemed like forever as nothing happened. Then he got on the radio again and said the same thing. Someone asked who he was. Hart said, "I'm one of the Western drivers up here at the front of the convoy with a wounded Soldier." Finally they said someone was coming up there.<sup>78</sup>

As Birkel was about run back to his bobtail, a civilian driver grabbed his shoulder and pointed to Hart's truck. There Birkel astonishingly saw Ricketts lying on the ground. Birkel ran yelling and waving to get Sharples' attention. After Sharples saw Ricketts, he picked up the radio and angrily said, "I thought you guys had said you had Ricketts. Why is he still here?" Someone answered, "I don't know. Get him up here because the choppers are here." When they reached Ricketts he was nearly faint from the pain. Birkel inspected Ricketts' leg wound and was surprised at how little it bled. The round had evidently cauterized the wound. Birkel and Sharples then carried their friend to Hart's cab and loaded him. Hart jumped up in his truck while they assisted Ricketts into the sleeper behind him and then one said, "Once you get him loaded, go on down to a casualty collection point." A Third Country National opened the door and asked if he could ride with Hart. Hart recognized him as one of the IAP Third Country Nationals and let him ride. So Hart drove off. His truck only had a few flat tires.<sup>79</sup>

As Birkel and Sharples ran back to their trucks, they forced the rest of the civilian drivers back into their trucks. Along the way they saw that one tractor had its airlines damaged so it could not pull its trailer, so they unhooked the trailer and had their bobtail come up and hook up to it. Birkel and Schrad then remained in the kill zone until the last of the civilian vehicles had cleared it. As the convoy drove forward, Hubbard came to and Kennedy told him to drive Regulator 2 forward. The last drivers of the 1075<sup>th</sup> Medium Truck cleared the kill zone.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Hart interview.

<sup>79</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Soldiers."

<sup>80</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" and Hynes, "Soldiers."

Over on the access road, Pullen told Hernandez that SGT Rivera needed to medevac soon. Hernandez told her, "Okay, let's go." So he crawled in the driver's seat of Stallion 33C to drive to the south casualty collection point. SGT Brown and SSG Castro mounted Regulator 3 and Brown told Hernandez to follow him there. Mike drove Raven 42A with Haynes in the turret behind them. Pullen sat in the back where the gunner normally stood and talked to Rivera. SPC Gregory, the gunner, rode up front in the vehicle commander's seat. Pullen looked out the window and saw blown up trucks and SUVs, what looked like total destruction. She got on the radio and asked where SPC Mike was. Someone said that he was behind her vehicle. She then asked where the landing zone was. He answered, "It's straight ahead. Just keep moving."<sup>81</sup>

Along the way they saw Regulator 2 still sitting in the kill zone behind the maintenance bobtail. Brown pulled Regulator 3 up to Regulator 2, where Kennedy informed him that Hubbard was seriously wounded. Brown then called for a gun truck from the south casualty collection point to come and pick up Hubbard. Stallion 33B was returning to the kill zone when they it flagged down. Brown and Castro jumped out then pulled Hubbard from his vehicle and put him in Stallion 33B's vehicle. Kennedy grabbed Burke's hand and placed it on Hubbard's bandages to keep the pressure on. Stallion 33C then drove him back to the south casualty collection point.<sup>82</sup>

The medevac helicopter arrived 1216 hours. SGT Baker and SPC Young were treating Mack's arm wound when Regulator 3, Stallion 33B and 33C arrived at the casualty collection point with Hubbard and Rivera. A Regulator 3 combat life saver then relieved Young and took care of the wounded so Young could return to his .50 and provide security. Pullen told Rivera that she was going to check on his boys, referring to Mike and Haynes. The wounded sergeant gave her a look like he wanted her to make sure they were okay. She told him when would be right back and climbed out of Stallion 33C. She ran into SPC Mike who handed Haynes off to her. She walked him over to the helicopter and asked how he was. He had a glazed look and was shot in the hand. He said, "I'm

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<sup>81</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" Minor, "Historical summary;" Castro, Brown and Hernandez interview; and Pullen interview.

<sup>82</sup> Gilkey, "Narrative;" Minor, "Historical summary;" and Castro, Brown and Hernandez interview.

okay. How are you?” She thought shock was setting in as he was a little off. She handed him to the guys in the helicopter and told him she was going back to get Mack. She walked over and looked down at Mack on the stretcher. She and he had fought with each other since she arrived in the company but bonded like brother and sister. She knelt down by his head because they were strapping him in and asked how he was. He looked up at her and asked, “Who are you?” Pullen responded, “What? It’s me, Hammons (her maiden name). How can you forget me? You hate me!” He asked her to tell them to loosen his straps because they hurt his wounded arm. They later found out that he had a collapsed lung. Someone loosened the straps and Mike grabbed one side of the stretcher, Pullen the other and another Soldier the other end. They loaded him in the helicopter. Pullen then went back to the stretcher with Rivera in Stallion 33C and the helicopter started to take off. She started yelling, “Where the hell are you going? I have another injured man down her!” The helicopter returned to the ground.<sup>83</sup>

Pullen held Rivera’s hand while they carried him to the helicopter. She told him that she would not leave him. She had only been in the company for a month and a half and had formed a bond with SGT Rivera. He had a death grip on her hand. When they reached the helicopter the medics asked what was wrong. She told him that Rivera had an entry and exit wound in his stomach. She was getting ready to crawl up in the helicopter but the crew would not let her go. She felt bad because she had promised her sergeant that she would not leave him or let anything happen to him. After the helicopter left with the three wounded, Pullen looked at Hernandez and SPC Gregory in Stallion 33C then said, “If you’re coming with me, I’m going because my guys are still under fire so you better get your asses in.” They climbed in the vehicle and Pullen signaled Mike that she was going back. The three HMMWVs, Raven 42A, Stallion 33B and 33C, returned to the access road where they found a large number of MPs sweeping the field north of the access road. Pullen got out of her vehicle and asked, “Where the hell did all these people come from? Where were they 20 minutes ago when I needed them? She manned the

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<sup>83</sup> Minor, “Historical summary,” and Pullen interview.

radio the rest of the day. Hernandez linked up with Brown in Regulator 3 and then drove north to Jacob and Uhl's casualty collection point.<sup>84</sup>

After Raven 42A left, Nein ordered his remaining Raven and Stallion Soldiers to sweep the field and two-story house while he and SGT Burke clear the irrigation ditch that paralleled the main road. SPC Simpson provided cover from the turret to Raven 42B. During the sweep some of the wounded Iraqis reached for their weapons and the Soldiers had to kill them. Those that did not resist were taken prisoner. They recovered 26 Iraqi insurgents killed and six wounded and collected 22 AKMs, 13 RPKs, six RPG launchers, 39 hand grenades and 16 RPG rockets, 123 full AKM magazines, and 52 empty magazines. Questioning of the detainees revealed that there had been 40 to 50 insurgents in the area with ten cars. Some of the insurgents had zip ties and handcuffs as a clear indication that they planned to take hostages. CPT Lindner arrived with the rest of the company and took over control of the scene. This relieved Stallion 33 so they could rejoin their convoy.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile at the north casualty collection point, a medevac helicopter landed in back of Jacob's HET convoy. Munos and another sergeant from Jacobs' HET convoy started to head into the kill zone to pick up one more wounded when the rest of the convoy arrived. Munos carried Ricketts, using the fireman's carry, over to their casualty collection point. Jacobs went to work on the leg wound. Torres finishing with Harris' head wound and came over and gave Jacobs and Munos bandages. Munos, Kirkland, Torres and Uhl transported the two wounded on litters to the helicopter. SSG Uhl received a call that another wounded was in the kill zone coming to the casualty collection point. After they loaded the third wounded on the medevac helicopter, Jacobs told Uhl then jumped in Sheppard's gun truck and drove to the kill zone. The kill zone was about 200 to 300 meters in front of her.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Minor, "Historical summary;" Hammons, Vogel, Saylor, Baker and Young sworn statements; and Pullen interview.

<sup>85</sup> Minor, "Historical summary;" Hammons, Burke and Simpson, sworn statements.

<sup>86</sup> Jacobs interview.

Jacobs saw a northbound white truck stopped with an RPG hole through the van. She also saw a bus tipped over in the middle of the road. On the other side of the bus from Jacobs was a burning vehicle and an SUV beside it. She saw Rickett's M915 behind it with its front end destroyed. They drove through the kill zone checking for wounded and sensitive items. The rest of the M915 convoy was still in a straight line on the side of the road.<sup>87</sup>

Jacobs met and talked with the crew of a Stallion 33 gun truck. They were shaken up. She asked them if they were with the 1075<sup>th</sup>. They said, "No." They were escorting Third Country Nationals and AAFES trucks to SCANIA. She asked one where the convoy commander was. He said the convoy commander was back counting trucks. Jacobs, Sheppard, the driver and gunner walked down looking for the convoy commander. She found Hammons and asked if all the trucks were accounted for. He said, "No." She then asked, "How many military vehicles did you have with you?" He said, "Three, one is down and another needs to be towed. The other one has two flat tires." All the Stallion 33 vehicles were shot up with multiple bullet holes. 33A had a damaged transmission, oil cooler, lost brakes and a flat tire. 33B had two flat tires. She told him that they were hauling battle damaged HMMWVs and they could take the tires or whatever they needed off. He called for his mechanic to go bring the tires. She told the convoy commander to have his mechanic meet up with her mechanic to take what they needed. He said, "I need you to get your people together and get a count of your vehicles." Jacobs asked how many killed and wounded he had. He responded that he had two killed, one Third Country National and another who worked for AAFES.<sup>88</sup>

Hammons left and Jacobs walked back to her bobtail to send a MTS message to convoy operations. By the time she reached her bobtail, around eight MPs were there and two Apaches flew overhead again. She had a long chat with them. After finishing an MTS dialog, she went down to Hammons to get a count and tell him to have his convoy fall in with her convoy. The MPs were pressuring her to move out. Jacobs told the convoy

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<sup>87</sup> Jacobs interview.

<sup>88</sup> Jacobs interview, and Hammons, sworn statement.

commander that she wanted two white trucks to fall in behind each of her whites. “Get all your people together and I’ll be right back.” She got back in her vehicle at the head of the convoy. She waited about 10 to 20 minutes until everyone had changed tires and hooked up Stallion 33A to a tow bar. Then Jacobs called out, “Mount up, we’re rolling.” The other convoy fell in with hers as planned.<sup>89</sup>

### Lessons

The purpose of studying battles is to learn lessons. As students of the art of war, we are armed with hindsight and a much better knowledge of what each element was doing. The problem with the chaos in battle is the fog of war that shrouds the participants from seeing and knowing everything. To learn from this battle, the student must learn what was done well and what mistakes were made. Then the student should place themselves in the various positions in the battle knowing only what the participant knew and decide what decisions they would have made or what they could have done to improve their comprehension of the battle. The great thing about this ambush was that there were a lot of moving parts and a student of the art of war has plenty of roles to choose from. Pointing out the mistakes of any particular person or unit is not meant as criticism as all war is chaos and mistakes are made on both sides. Victory is often determined by who makes the least mistakes or capitalizes on their enemy’s mistakes. Pointing out these mistakes makes for a more realistic portrayal of what happens in a battle. The most important thing is the outcome and for this battle, all the participants can take pride.

The Anti-Iraqi Freedom Insurgents (AIF) evidently liked to attack on significant dates. This ambush was launched on the anniversary of the beginning of the ground war in 2003 and also Palm Sunday. While this was not quite the anniversary of the Easter Weekend ambushes, it was close. They clearly wanted to take hostages as they had done on Good Friday 2004 and the anniversary of the fall of Baghdad. Unfortunately, the situation on 20 March 2005 turned bad for the Iraqi insurgents.

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<sup>89</sup> Jacobs interview and Hammons, sworn statement.

This ambush also hinted that they wanted to take advantage of the one-year rotation policy of the US Army. The last big ambushes began in April 2004 when all the units were new to the theater. By March 2005, no OIF 2 transportation units were on the road. The 518<sup>th</sup> Gun Truck Company had been reformed from volunteers in November 2004, but the new leadership had not reinforced the turn, fix and fight tactic or not placed the same emphasis on weapons training. Similarly, B Battery, 1-623<sup>rd</sup> FA (Stallion 33) was also new in country and interestingly, both units responded the same way, the way they were taught by MPRI. Palm Sunday became both units' first complex ambush. As the Army would send brand new units to Iraq each spring, the Iraqis would gain another year of experience. The individual rotation policy during the Vietnam War ensured a better transfer of knowledge and experience, it resulted in poor cohesion. The unit rotation provides better cohesion but leaves the units vulnerable during the first few months of their arrival.

Prior to this ambush, the insurgents usually fired on the white trucks but during this ambush the small arms fire was directed at the green trucks and the fire hit mostly in the cab area. The insurgents had hand cuffs and zip ties on them and the MPs remembered seeing the trucks of their escape vehicles open. The insurgents clearly wanted American casualties and captives.

The turn of events was not due to the lack of planning and preparation of the insurgents. Generally, the enemy operated at either the squad-size or company-size when conducting ambushes. Based upon their cellular structure of four to seven insurgents per cell, a company-sized ambush was usually included 40 to 50 insurgents. In this case, about 50 insurgents established about a 1,000 meter kill zone. The access road divided the kill zone in two parts with approximately 35 insurgents north of it and 15 south. They tend to follow standard ambush doctrine with their force divided into security, support and assault elements. Supposed to initiate with the most casualty producing device followed up by rockets and small arms fire, it began with small arms and RPGs. The fire increased gradually not everyone firing at one time. Even with stationary targets, the insurgents are not very accurate with RPGs as only a small fraction hit their targets. They did have

snipers or designated marksmen spread out through the kill zone and at least one was armed with armored piercing rounds. Two such rounds penetrated Ricketts' door and one hit him in the leg.

The Stallion 33 gun trucks cleared the kill zone and established a casualty collection point south of it where they repeatedly drove back into the kill zone to pick up wounded. A couple of their M1114s joined the fight in the access road with the two of the 617<sup>th</sup> MP that had been shadowing the southbound convoy. The 1075<sup>th</sup> and 518<sup>th</sup> engaged the southern part of the kill zone.

This was a well planned and executed L-shaped ambush that caught two convoys in the kill zone. It was oriented to catch a southbound convoy. Coincidentally, a northbound convoy had entered the kill zone at the same time. Either by accident or design, the insurgents initiated the ambush with both in the kill zone. The problem with attacking two convoys at the same time was that it doubled the number of gun trucks in the kill zone. What their spotters of the security element failed to identify was that an MP route security patrol was shadowing the southbound convoy. This tripled the number of gun trucks giving the convoys an advantage. Expecting a truly soft target, the insurgents unexpectedly had nine HMMWV gun trucks coming at them from opposite directions. However, the access road divided the kill zone into two separate fights.

Although it was the doctrine for convoys not to stop in the kill zone, in the confusion of the battle, the civilian drivers did. Third Country Nationals were the unpredictable factor in ambushes. RPG and IEDs brought the southbound convoy to a halt. Regulator 1 in the northbound convoy inadvertently hit the brakes and caused the convoy behind to stop. Both the north and southbound convoys came to a halt with three vehicles escaping the kill zone. The insurgents had not done so well in any of their recent ambushes. At first it looked like things were going in favor of the insurgents. Unfortunately, the language barrier did not allow the convoy escorts to properly instill in the Third Country Nationals the importance of remaining in their vehicles. When they got out, this kept the rest of the convoy from driving down the road. By riding at the head of the convoy, however, the

convoy commander of the 1075<sup>th</sup> was able to escape the kill zone, but was the only one. Uhl was unable to influence the action behind him. In the event that an ambush splits a convoy, most of the important decisions have to be made in the middle or rear of the convoy. The lead element will most likely always escape the kill zone. By the end of the Vietnam War, convoy commanders knew to ride in the middle or rear of the convoys for this very reason.

The assistant convoy commander, a junior E5, took action about ten to fifteen minutes into the ambush. Because of the ratio of green to white trucks, squads escorted convoys. NCOs led many of the convoys in Iraq yet none of their military education trained them for this. The units that historically performed the best during ambushes were those that war-gamed every possible scenario daily. There can not be enough emphasis placed on this type of training. Not only that but rank should not be the criteria for responsibility. By 1969, the 8<sup>th</sup> Transportation Group in Vietnam appointed convoy and assistant convoy commanders based upon their experience rather than rank. It was not unusual for a sergeant to be a convoy commander with a lieutenant riding along to gain experience.

The doctrine that the gun trucks followed was for the lead gun truck to lead the convoy to the rally point. Stallion 33A did this, but only one vehicle followed. Since only one vehicle of their convoy escaped, Regulator 1 remained in the kill zone where most of the trucks were destroyed and thus bore the brunt of the fighting. It only left the kill zone after the lead part of the convoy departed. The remaining two gun trucks in each convoy held their ground and defended their part of the convoy. However, Regulator 2 put up a short fight and cleared the kill zone after their driver was wounded. Regulator 3 had a dilemma. It had to protect the rear of the convoy but the fight was up front. It left the rear of the convoy and drove behind the convoy till it found a gap in the convoy then raced to the access road, just as Stallion 33B and 33C did when they received the call for help. Regulator 3 also drove behind the convoy similar to Raven 42 then looked for an opening. With the exception of Regulator 2, the gun trucks of Regulator and Stallion 33 performed identically. This was the MPRI doctrine.

This was the first complex ambush for the new members of the 518<sup>th</sup> Gun Truck Company. The new units had to learn how to fight the war for the first time while the enemy had two years of experience. The crews of did not perform like the original company and did not follow their “turn, fix and fire” doctrine. Part of it resulted from the short hand-off between the old and new crews and change in tactics due to weakness in armor. Keep in mind that the original 518<sup>th</sup> developed their tactics with hillbilly armor.

The decisive action of the battle was the offensive action taken by Raven 42. The MPs of Raven 42 used a more aggressive posture and tried to flank the enemy. Like the old 518<sup>th</sup> they conducted daily after action reviews and war gamed constantly. They had been blooded so each member knew how he or she would perform as well as knew how the others would perform. They had confidence in their leaders and followed the others lead. While the Regulators and Stallion 33 performed as MPRI doctrine trained them, the main lesson was that the units which conduct daily after action reviews, rehearse and war game perform the best. They knew the area and had rehearsed their tactics for such an occasion. One possible miscalculation Raven 42 made was that they underestimated the size of the enemy and kill zone. They knew the terrain but what they thought was the flank turned out to be the middle and they were caught in the cross fire. SSG Nein expecting a force of no more than 12 insurgents as he had faced before planned to cut off their retreat and kill or capture all of them. Knowing the access road was ahead of them, he raced his squad to with the intension of flanking the enemy. To his surprise, Nein cut the insurgents off from their egress vehicles but he had faced around 50 insurgents spread out over a kilometer and the access road was in the middle of the kill zone not the flank. This miscalculation put Raven 42A in the cross fire of two enemy positions. This was the product of the fog of war, however, realizing the dire circumstances, the MPs countered again. SPC Mike and SSG Nein quieted the fire from their rear (south) then Nein led an assault on the enemy north of road. Raven 42A's .50 had accounted well for itself in killing insurgents in the main canal.

Historically, the units that performed the best in ambushes conducted extensive after action reviews, talked over their tactics and revised them constantly. This eliminated

confusion and caused the participants to act in unison and instinctively. Over the previous three years of the war, MPs were not known among truck drivers for bravery, however, Raven 42 demonstrated how MPs should perform. Caught in a bad situation, they responded quickly and violently turning the fight back on the enemy. The 617<sup>th</sup> MP Company had strong leadership involvement from the company commander down. The loss of the aggressive leaders and lack of proper company grade officer involvement in the training and after action reviews of the new 518<sup>th</sup> resulted in a passive posture and a little hesitation. The Regulators did perform heroically but what was needed in the northbound convoy was someone taking charge as soon as the convoy bunched up, halted, but then to get them moving. This happened more at the individual level rather than from a single leader and ten to 15 minutes into the fight. Good rehearsals and war-gaming of the different scenarios would have taught this. The 617<sup>th</sup> acted without hesitation but then they also put themselves between the cross fire of the enemy rather than on the flank. Raven 42C took heavy casualties for this. Still, quick decisive leadership turned a bad situation into a good one. The fight on the access road was the turning point in the battle. The key to the American success was their ability to adapt to the changing situation faster than the enemy and fire power. Had the insurgents trapped one convoy with only three gun trucks, the situation would most definitely have turned out differently. For this many vehicles, it took 9 gun trucks to turn the fight back on the enemy. The 1:10 ratio only allowed for a passive defense. The additional three gun trucks allowed them to take the offense and turn the battle around.

The worst indictment in the 518<sup>th</sup> was the failure of the M2 .50 caliber machineguns. None of their .50s could fire more than seven rounds before the weapons misfired. Clearly, the timing was off on all three and had they been able to test fire their weapons, they would have realized this early on. No investigation was conducted as to who set the timing. This once again reinforces why it is important to test fire weapons before each operation. The purpose of higher headquarters is to provide the Soldiers the best means to accomplish their mission not impede it.

War is chaos and mistakes were made on both sides. The side that wins is the side that recovers from its mistakes and takes advantage of the enemy's mistakes the quickest. This ambush turned out to be the most complicated ambush of the war. No other ambush had as many units involved. It is an excellent study of what happens when convoys get trapped in the kill zone and the difference between aggressive and defensive tactics. The sweep of the northern half recovered 26 dead Iraqis and six prisoners and enough weapons for 41 insurgents. There was no sweep of the kill zone south of the access road to determine how many Iraqis were killed by the 518<sup>th</sup> and 1075<sup>th</sup> but by eye witness accounts, the enemy took a beating there, too. Coalition casualties were three Third Country Nationals killed and seven wounded, the 617<sup>th</sup> MP had only three Soldiers wounded and one of its HMMWVs severely damaged. The 1075<sup>th</sup> and 518<sup>th</sup> suffered five Soldiers wounded-in-action, three civilian wounded, two destroyed M915s, and four destroyed civilian tractor-trailer systems. All three 518<sup>th</sup> gun trucks were shot up but from SSG Van Roekel's inspection, Regulator 3 had the most battle damage. There were no Americans killed or captured. That was a pretty good day in anybody's book! The ambush on Palm Sunday turned out to be a one-sided battle in favor of the coalition. The 518<sup>th</sup> and 1075<sup>th</sup> believed that this ambush occurred on ASR BISMARCK and referred to it as the Battle of Bismarck. Others referred to it as the Palm Sunday Ambush. Since it occurred on ASR DETROIT, Dr. Tom Bruscino of Combat Studies Institute recognized it as the Palm Sunday Ambush.

In recognition of their heroism, SPC Jason Mike, SGT Leigh Ann Hester and SSG Timothy Nein received Silver Star Medals for their actions during the battle. SPC Beck, however, only received the Bronze Star Medal. No one in the 518<sup>th</sup> was decorated.